

By the same author:

STOKENHAM PARISH TITHE MAP 1841
extracts and notes

THE LORDS OF STOKENHAM
and their feudal manor in south Devon

RECORDS OF FAMILY NAMES
3000 Stokenham references to 400 family names

STOKENHAM OCCASIONAL PAPERS : Book 1
Queen Katherines Rental : 1547
Wreck of Sea : 1588
The Church of Hurdestoke : 1198

STOKENHAM

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

BOOK 2

Made and published by
W. A. Roberts, Swallowfield, Beeson, Kingsbridge Devon TQ7 2HW

1981 Reprinted 1983, 1984, 1987, 1993

ISBN 0 946266 04 2

STOKENHAM OCCASIONAL PAPERS
General Preface

The purpose of these occasional papers is to put on record information collected during a continuing study of Stokenham parish, so that the information remains readily available and does not drop back into obscurity.

In each paper, the document or event which is recorded is supported by sufficient additional information to give it a context and a background.

Each paper deals with a single topic and stands alone.

1980

W. A. Roberts

Book 2 : CONTENTS

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE & STOKENHAM CHURCH

Sir Francis Drake sought and obtained from Queen Elizabeth the advowson of Stokenham church for his old shipmate Francis Fletcher, chaplain of the 'Golden Hind' on her remarkable journey round the world. Fletcher then introduced as vicar of Stokenham one Patrick Blare, chaplain to Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Admiral of the English fleet which defeated the Spanish Armada. The story is well documented.

CHILLINGTON GRIST MILL

A site survey and a review of documents has made it possible to re-establish the ground plan of Chillington grist mill with its water-wheel, mill leat, pond and tail race, and to estimate the dates at which the mill operated.

UPROAR IN COURT : 1556

Eight named men of Stokenham fought with the presiding steward in the manorial court and carried their riot into divine service t Stokenham church. A vividly descriptive document ends with the lord of the manor asking King Philip and Queen Mary to put the men on trial in the Star Chamber.

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE & STOKENHAM CHURCH

Fletcher seems to have continued at sea as a chaplain for a while after that famous journey and perhaps later had some responsibility for the appointment and control of chaplains serving in Her Majesty's ships. That would be compatible with his later wish to have the right to make the appointment of the vicar at Stokenham and his subsequent choice of an ex-chaplain for the post.

In 1583 Drake petitioned Queen Elizabeth that his old shipmate Francis Fletcher should be granted the advowson¹ of Stokenham church, then in the gift of the Crown, so that he, Fletcher, could make his own appointment to the living when it should fall vacant. Queen Elizabeth agreed to Drake's request.²

A vacancy at Stokenham duly occurred and Fletcher then presented to that living one Patrick Blare, a Scot domiciled in England.³ Blare took up his appointment at Stokenham in 1588 on the eve of the battle against the Armada.⁴ He was serving as a chaplain to the Lord Admiral, Lord Howard of Effingham, and since Lord Howard in his flagship 'Ark Royal' was in command of the British fleet which, with Drake, broke and defeated the Spanish Armada, it is probable that Patrick Blare, vicar of Stokenham from 1588 to 1593, served as a sea going chaplain in that historic battle.

That sequence of events is essentially simple, but it has within it a secondary story of administrative complication and error, centred around Stokenham church.

Stokenham church had once belonged to Bisham Priory in Berkshire, to which it had been granted by a lord of Stokenham in the 15th century⁵. When all the wealth, buildings, lands and possessions of the abbeys, monasteries and priories were seized by Henry VIII, the advowson of Stokenham church passed to the Crown.

When the Privy Council, on behalf of Queen Elizabeth and at the initial request of Sir Francis Drake, granted the advowson of the church of Stokenham to Francis Fletcher by letters patent of 13 May 1583 and when Fletcher then presented Patrick Blare to the living, all that was superficially orthodox and correct.

The Privy Council, however had made an administrative mistake, By separate letters patent of 28 February 1588 they granted the advowson and presentation of the church of Stokenham to an entirely different party, namely one Henry Evans.

In both the grants, as was the custom, the gift of the advowson was to become effective whenever the living of Stokenham should next fall vacant. When that happened, Francis Fletcher, acting on his grant of 1583, presented to the living his nominee Patrick Blare.

Henry Evans, however, acting quite properly on his own grant of 1588, insisted that Patrick Blare was improperly installed and sought to have him ejected from the living.

The controversy was referred back to the Privy Council who then had to arrive at a decision expressing the will of the Queen. The further letters patent which resulted from their deliberation set aside their own grant to Henry Evans and confirmed the grant of the advowson to Francis Fletcher and the tenancy of the living to his nominee Patrick Blare, despite Blare's admittedly defective title.

The decision reflects the esteem of Queen Elizabeth for Sir Francis Drake and her wish to favour his initial petition in that matter. In the letters patent of 18 July 1589 recording this final decision there are references to Drake's past services. There is also a non-specific recognition of the past services of Patrick Blare, quite probably as a chaplain in Lord Howard's flagship during the defeat of the Queen's enemies of the Spanish Armada.

The exploits of Drake had given him control over the appointment to the living of Stokenham. The service of Francis Fletcher as chaplain to Drake in the famous world voyage had won him Drake's support in the selection of a chaplain-priest for Stokenham. The services of chaplain Patrick Blare to the Crown in the ships of Queen Elizabeth had brought him royal support in his contested tenure of the Stokenham living.

Nothing more is heard of the displaced Henry Evans, for whom one may feel sympathy. He had become a victim of the national and regal popularity and influence won by the exploits of Sir Francis Drake.

.....

Appendix:

This appendix recites the substance of the letters patent of 18 July 1589 in which the Privy Council admitted its earlier mistake and put matters right by a new decision.

The 1589 document ⁶ first sets the scene by recounting that by letters patent of 27 February 1580 the advowson covering the next presentation to Stokenham had been granted by Queen Elizabeth to John Cole Esquire, who had presented to the living Robert Barry (sic).

The living became vacant with the death of this Robert Barre and the complication surrounding the next presentation then began.

By letters patent of 13 May 1583, Queen Elizabeth, wishing to reward the 'great and acceptable service' of Sir Francis Drake had, at Drake's 'special request' granted the next advowson and presentation of Stokenham church to Francis Fletcher, giving Fletcher the right to present the next vicar to Stokenham whenever the living should fall vacant.

When the Stokenham vacancy did arise, Francis Fletcher presented to the Stokenham living 'Patrick Blare, clerk, one of the ordinary chaplains of our dear and loving cousin Charles Howard, Lord of Effingham... who is now in possession thereof'.

But the Privy Council then admits that 'notwithstanding our said grant unto the said Francis Fletcher ... w ... then not remembering our former grant unto Francis Fletcher ... did ... by our letters patent of 28 February 1588 ... grant the next advowson ... and ... Henry Evans, as we are informed, not goeth about to frustrate our former grant unto Francis Fletcher and to remove and expel Patrick Blare from possession of the vicarage'.

The Privy Council go on to say, on behalf of Queen Elizabeth, that despite their own grant made to Henry Evans they do want Patrick Blare to 'enjoy the vicarage and the full effect of our gift and grant' both because of 'great and special causes moving us in that behalf' and also at the 'gracious and loving request of our most dear and loving brother James the King of Scots on behalf of the said Patrick'.

So the Privy Council revokes and repeals the grant to Henry Evans and instructs the Chancellor to cancel the grant by royal authority. Then 'in consideration of the good and acceptable service heretofore done by the said Patrick Blare we give, grant, ratify, confirm, approve and allow the estate and incumbency of the said Patrick in and to the said vicarage ... notwithstanding he have not sufficient and good title ... and intend he shall enjoy the same with all the rights, commodities and appurtenances thereunto belonging, during his natural life, in such and the same ample manner and form as the said Robert Barre, or any other vicar or incumbent thereof at any time heretofore had enjoyed the same'.

NOTES & REFERENCES

Bibliography: 'The World Encompassed: carefully collected out of the Notes of Master Francis Fletcher'

1628 and modern editions

'The Sea Chaplains' : Gordon Taylor: 1978

¹ Advowson: the right of presenting a clergyman to a benefice: a property which might be in the ownership of the Crown, or an ecclesiastic or a lay person.

² PRO 066/1228/m32, Pat Rolls 25 Eliz: which says in essence, that Francis Fletcher, a Bachelor of Theology, is to have the first and next presentation – once only. He is to present a suitable man as Vicar and is to do all the things that the Crown would have done as patron.

³ PRO Cal Pat Rolls Eliz 1: Patrick Blare, clerk, a Scottish subject, was granted letters of Denization (meaning naturalisation) on 20 Oct 1570

⁴ Blare's institution as vicar of Stokenham occurred on May 26 1588: Devon RO, Woolton's Register f 37.

⁵ 'The Lords of Stokenham' : W A Roberts : 1979: p 37

⁶ PRO C66/1330 mm 42, 43 : Pat Rolls 31 Eliz.

CHILLINGTON GRIST MILL

For a thousand years, until the industrial revolution, manors and parishes such as Stokenham sustained themselves in considerable independence. They consumed their own crops and produce and they were supported by the manufactures and services of their own craftsmen. They had little need for constant communication with the outside world and the bad roads discouraged it. In such a self contained community the corn mills were of basic importance. They ground the locally grown corn into flour for the daily bread and into coarser feed for the livestock.

Every village needed access to a mill. Chillington had two. One was the Stokenham corn mill at the western extreme of the village¹, so ancient and important that the parish boundaries themselves had been distorted to include the mill and its water when the manor or parish first was formed. The second was the Chillington grist mill of much later date.

There is very little now left of the Chillington grist mill, behind Newmans at the eastern end of the village. It has been derelict and ruinous for a hundred years. The traces which remain are a few fragments of stonework, an indication of the mill leat and some scraps of documentary evidence. This paper, prepared from a survey and study during the winter of 1980-81, aids to record what still remains and to provide an account of Chillington grist mill before the last traces of it disappear.

Historical background

The term 'grist mill' was initially used simply to distinguish a mill which ground corn from mills which served other manufacturing purposes, such as the fulling of cloth or the working of iron. It was only late in the story of mills that the description 'grist' began to have a narrower connotation as meaning the coarse grinding of materials for cattle food as opposed to the fine grinding of flour for human consumption. It is probable that the Chillington mill initially served both purposes, as was then usual, but it may in its later life, when flour became available from cheaper sources, have become predominantly a mill for cattle food.

Before the industrial revolution the only sources of power available were the natural ones such as time, wind, water and the labour of horses, oxen and men. Manufactures requiring natural resources were most readily available. When the steam engine was invented and the industrial revolution began, the convenient central location and the necessary workers then brought in from the countryside to live in the new developing industrial towns clustered around the 'dark Satanic mills'.

One result which followed in the countryside was that areas such as Stokenham found a new 'export' market for their agricultural products which were needed to feed those landless workers of the industrial towns. That caused the development in the late eighteenth century of additional rural processing resources, such as mills.

At a later time and a slower pace, however, that same development of the manufacturing towns began to depress rural processing industries by providing cheaper competing products from the mills and factories of the industrial centres. Water, wind and tidal mills were among the casualties. That transition from the products of the countryside to the products of the town was reinforced by the widening provision of hard-surfaced roads which replaced the earlier difficult roads and made practicable the ready distribution of manufactured goods from the towns to the rural areas, which then progressively lost their self sufficiency and isolation of a thousand years.

All these ingredients helped to shape the destiny of the Chillington grist mill.

Dates

References to the Chillington grist mill are not found in early Stokenham documents. Its first certain appearance seems to be in the Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1798. That map (Figure 1) shows the artificially deflected mill stream and the mill buildings. The mill had come into existence in the second half of the eighteenth century when the agricultural 'export' trade earlier mentioned was developing.

After that time there are various references to the grist mill. It is shown on the 1841 parish tithe map (Figure 2) and the 'grist mill and garden' are listed in the tithe apportionments. The grist mill is listed also in the parish rate books of the late nineteenth century.² By 1878 however, the rate books show it as 'void and unoccupied' and its rateable value had been cut by half. The displacement of rural industries earlier mentioned was gathering momentum. Here and elsewhere in the countryside the disuse and decay of the rural mills had begun.

By the time of the 1886 survey for the new large scale Ordnance Survey map (Figure 3) the grist mill was derelict and had partly disappeared, or been overbuilt, so that the remains shown on that map no longer matched the tithe map drawing of 1841. The total life of the mill had been about a hundred years, from about 1770 to 1870.

During the 110 years which have since passed the remains of the mill have steadily decayed. By the winter of 1980-81 when this present account was being prepared, only a few disconnected fragments of stone walls remained, partly over-built by later work and extensively over grown.

By expanding the scale and representation of a small area of the 1886 map, shown within the rectangle superimposed on Figure 3, and then comparing that expanded result (Figure 4) with measurements and searches on the site, it became possible to discern which were the remaining fragments of the original mill and so to reconstruct an image of it. To assist discussion of that original mill plan it will be helpful to pause and examine first the principles on which a characteristic water mill operated.

Water mill principles (Figure 5)

The wheel of a water mill (1) rotated under the impulsion of a flow of water which had to be kept as regular and continuous as possible. For this reason there was commonly a mill pond in which water was accumulated from an incoming mill leat and then controlled by sluices before it was conducted to the wheel to strike the paddles and so to rotate the wheel and the mill machinery.

The external bearing of the waterwheel axle (4) was carried on a wall (5) which formed one side of the wheel pit (2).

The main axle, having passed through the wall of the mill to the interior of the building, then immediately carried a great gear wheel (6). The gears in that wheel meshed with the gears of a wheel (7) which converted the rotation of the horizontal axle to the rotation of a vertical shaft. That milling shaft (8) was then turning at a much higher speed than the main axle.

At an upper point of the milling shaft, power was taken off to the millstones, as at 9 and 10. The diagram suggests a belt drive, but only for clarity of presentation: in practice it was by further coggged wheels.³ Belts were used for the lighter loads taken off further up the milling shaft (and not shown) to drive ancillary equipment such as tool grinding wheels and a hoist.

The drive from the milling shaft turned the rotating stones 11 and 12. There might be one to four sets of millstones for different kinds of grinding or for greater output.

Three surviving millstones were found on site at Chillington. One, very worn, is in use as part of a fence. The other two, in much better condition, were seen in the barn near the division of the mill stream. All these stones are 3½ feet in diameter, which suggests a small or average size of mill.

The lower fixed millstones, 13 and 14, were, in a working mill, surrounded by a wooden casing (15) having a chute outlet (16) down which the flour flowed into a bin or waiting sack.

The grain was fed by a funnel (17) into the central eye of the rotating millstone. A vibrating agitator, called the 'damsel', in the mouth of the funnel kept the grain flowing evenly: it was important that the stones should never run empty.

Radial channels with cutting edges, incised into the milling faces of the rotating and fixed stones, cut and round the grain and urged the material progressively towards the outer edges of the stones where it discharged into the wooden casing and thence down the chute (16) to the delivery point.

The functions described in Figure 5 were most naturally and conveniently arranged above each other in a building of two or three storeys on a small site base, which gave the grist mills their characteristic shape. A hoist powered from the water wheel lifted the bags of grain to the top of the system, to be fed into the input chute, and the flour was taken out in bags at the bottom.

The Mill Building

Measurements of the remains on site, coupled with the information given by the expanded map of Figure 4, made it possible to reconstruct the outline of the mill structures. It appears to have been of the shape completed by the dotted outline on Figure 4.

It is evident that a cleared, flat, rectangular site was first created, at a level similar to that of the access lane from the village. To produce that flat site it was necessary at the northern end to cut into the hillside which slopes down towards the mill building from the north and the east. The vertical cut surfaces of the hillside were then secured by retaining walls which, with other walls, partially remain as indicated by the solid lines.

The water wheel pit is in the area lying between B and C. The northern retaining wall of it still remains, at an irregular height up to five feet. That pit wall was constructed of layers of grey water-resistant stone identical with that used elsewhere along the side of the mill leat. The southern wall of the wheel pit is gone but its footings were found a few inches below the present surface. Its materials seem to have been used to build a wall which now runs diagonally across the dotted enclosure and is later than the 1886 map, where it is not shown.

The east wall of the wheel pit is present to a height of some eight feet and a length of 5½ feet. Where it joins the further retaining wall, which formed part of the main mill building, the masonry changes to larger blocks of pinkish sandstone. A similar material was used in the single-storey building at A which formed part of the group and still remains, being now used as a domestic outhouse. The sandstone was no doubt preferable for use in the main mill structure but unsuitable for the wet turbulent conditions of the wheel pit.

The wheel pit is 18 feet long so that after allowing for eighteen inches of clearance on either side, the water wheel was 15 feet in diameter. The breadth of the wheel was 4 feet as defined, similarly, by the width of the pit.

Around the bottom of the surviving walls of the pit at perhaps two feet from the original bottom, there are slate shelves three inches thick set in the wall and projecting about six inches. Their purpose was to contain and channel the rushing water passing below the wheel and so avoid any loss of power.

It follows from the dimensions quoted that the northern support of the wheel axle, at the middle of the northern retaining wall, was about 10 feet above site ground level. The other end of the axle

would therefore be entering the mill building at a height which required a second storey. There seems to be no way of knowing whether there was a third storey.

The main mill building, containing the machinery and stones, was a southward extension of the wheel pit making it into a fatter rectangle. There was a link, as indicated in Figure 4, between the mill building proper and the auxiliary building A but close examination of one of the three original copies of the tithe map⁴ suggests that it was an enclosure rather than a building.

The overall shape of the building group resulting from this analysis and survey, shown as completed by the dotted line in Figure 4, agrees satisfactorily with that shown on the tithe map (Figure 2) which was drawn at a time when the mill was intact and working.

The Water Courses

The siting of the mill was chosen to use the power of the vigorous stream which tumbles down the sloping valley bottom from the direction of Coleridge and reaches Chillington at Brook Cottages. It seems possible that this stream from Coleridge was once known as the Garonne (a Celtic word for 'river'), because the mill has at times past been described as the 'Garonne grist mill'.⁵ Where the stream runs freely, in its upper reaches, the hedge which borders it is, by species count, among the oldest hedges of the parish.⁶

In the meadow around the mill the stream is now piped underground along the valley bottom⁷ but in living memory it ran in an open channel boxed by slate 'shiners'.⁸ There is a lesser and supplementary stream which reinforces the supply of water for the mill and enters the site from the east.

220 yards higher up the valley, north of the mill site, the stream from Coleridge was partially deflected into a secondary artificially-created channel. The point of deflection and the formation into two separate channels (both now underground) can still be seen at a point near the barn at the northern end of the mill meadow.

The newly-formed secondary channel, which was to become the mill leat was cut along the side of the hill towards the mill site and increasingly above the sinking valley bottom. It was formed at a continuous gradient just sufficient to maintain a steady flow of water and by the time it reached the mill site, which had been cut into the hill as earlier described, it had a head of some 20 feet above the ground level of the mill.

On the eastern side of this long mill leat, the side on which the hillside rose eastwards, the earth was retained by a stone boundary wall all along the channel, built in the same manner and material (and presumably at the same time) as the retaining wall at the side of the water-wheel pit.

Along the other bank of the mill leat the excavated spoil was used to provide a flat trackway for the packhorses journeying with grain and flour between Coleridge and the mill. The trackway travelled with the leat along the route marked as a footpath in the 1886 map (Figure 3).

At the point Z on Figure 3, where there are still substantial stone gateposts, the leat was culverted under a bridge which connected two adjacent fields, where access was necessary. The structure of that bridge then formed the northern limit of a triangular mill pond which ran to a southern extremity formed by a solid triangle of stonework marked I on the map of Figure 4. At that point the secondary stream from the east also entered the pond.

The water from the mill pond passed along a channel between the triangle of stonework and the boundary wall, probably controlled by a sluice. It then with gathering velocity was arranged to fall 8 feet over a distance of 21 feet to enter the wheel pit through a threshold and opening still present and struck the paddles at the circumference of the mill wheel at a height just below the

level of the axle. The water then passed under the wheel and out of the wheel pit by way of a culvert under the packhorse track and raced down a remaining strip of sloping hillside to rejoin the original stream at the valley bottom.

Notes and References

Acknowledgement: Appreciation and thanks are expressed to Mr. Browse Prettejohn and Mr. George Tolchard, the landowners by whose kind permission and goodwill this survey of the mill side and its neighbourhood was made possible.

Bibliography: 'British Water-mills': L Syson: 1965
'Watermills': J. Vince: Shire Publications: 1970

1. Stokenham Corn Mill, at the west end of Chillington, south of the main road: now known as Mill Farm.
2. The Stokenham parish rate books mentioned in this paragraph (for the highway rate, the poor rate and the general rate) were kindly lent to me by Mr. Peter Cowell whose ancestors, of the Prettejohn family, were parish highway surveyors and poor-rate overseers in the 19th century.
3. The drive to the stones was commonly taken off the milling shaft at a point physically below the stones and the driving shaft then entered the rotating upper stone from below, passing through a clearance hole at the eye of the fixed stone. It was then practicable to take off the top stone for the dressing of the stone faces. The gearing driving the stones could be disengaged when the mill was shut down.
4. The point was checked on the tithe map kept in Stokenham church.
5. As when the 'Garonne grist mill' was advertised for sale in 1867.
6. The age of a hedge may be assessed by a count of certain species (Dr. M. D. Cooper: Standing Conference for Local History: 1971). The writer has made a survey on that principle throughout Stokenham parish (not yet published). The Garonne hedge appears to have an age of not less than 800 years.
7. Along the line marked XXX in Figure 3.
8. 'Shiners' (so named, perhaps, from the way they glitter when wet) are used widely in the parish to form field boundaries and to support earth banks. They come from the sheets of slate exposed and removed when the more useful top stone is being lifted from local quarries. In size and shape they are reminiscent of irregular gravestones.

UPROAR IN COURT : 1556

The Document ¹ transcribed later in this paper gives a colourful glimpse of a dramatic incident in Tudor Stokenham. It also contains historical information about the community of those days and mentions various family names which are still represented in the parish.

In the harsh feudal system of the Norman conquerors, the lord of the manor held his estate by the uncertain grace and favour of the king, to whom he had to render military and financial services in return. Correspondingly, the tenants of the manor held their lands as bondmen of the lord of the manor, owing him on return homage, rent and personal service.

In succeeding centuries both these characteristics were progressively softened. By the 17th century the change had been completed, although the older forms and titles remained in use long afterwards. The feudal lord had been transformed into a country landowner, powerful still, but powerful under the law. His tenants had moved from the status of serfs and villains to that of prosperous yeoman farmers holding their lands on long leases and sometimes owning them.

The struggle towards freedom had been a long and sometimes bitter one. The incidents related in this document belong to a stage late in that historical process, during the reign of Philip and Mary, when the spirit of freedom was growing in vigour and soon was to flourish in the golden adventurous days of Queen Elizabeth.

The document concerns a bitter dispute between some men of Stokenham and their lord, a dispute which exploded violently in the manorial court at Stokenham. The manorial court, meeting every few weeks, was the focus for the lord's control of his manor, operated through his steward, and it had, technically, more than one juridical element.

The reeve, who figures prominently in the story of this dispute, was an officer of the manor, appointed annually, responsible for the day-by-day running of practical operations in the manor and for the collection of rents. He was commonly, but not invariably, elected by the tenantry; but the steward, as the top administrator, was always appointed by the lord.

The decisions of the manorial courts were recorded, as they occurred, in the court rolls. That 'court book', fought over in the incident to be described, was of great importance as the repository of all the recorded decisions affecting and controlling life in the manor, including tenancies, rentals and duties. The 'customs of the manor', so established and recorded, were important to both lord and tenant. To the lord they were important as indicating the limits to which he could push the tenants and expect obedience and loyalty. To the tenants they were a protection against oppression by a perhaps potentially tyrannical lord.

For the convenience of everyone, the customs of Stokenham manor, as in other manors, were at intervals summarised in the 'customary book' to which reference is made in this story. The customary book of Stokenham current in Tudor times has disappeared: perhaps it was its seizing during this recorded incident which caused it to be lost. There are now only some scraps of the customs to be found recorded here and there.²

The events described in the document occurred during a period when the manor of Stokenham had fallen back into the hands of the Crown. The Court of Augmentations, which managed some Crown revenues and especially those derived from property seized by Henry VIII at the dissolution of the monasteries, had leased the manor of Stokenham to Arthur Stourton for 25 years, as the document itself records. There are other documents recording disputes between Arthur Stourton and his tenants.³

The document which follows is more or less in its original form but with occasional omissions, divisions and punctuation which make it a little easier to read.

To the King and Queen's most excellent Majesties: humbly complaining sheweth unto your Highnesses your true and faithful subject and servant Arthur Stourton Esquire.

Our late Sovereign Lord King Edward VI was seised of the Manor of Stokingham and the hundred of Coleridge, within which Manor the custom for the time out of mind has been that the Lord of the Manor for the time being may, at his pleasure, yearly nominate and appoint the reeve to gather the rents of the Manor, as by a certain customary book is declared: and may also refuse to accept such customary tenant of the Manor as the 12 men of the Manor may elect yearly to be reeve.

The said late King by his Letters Patent sealed at the Court of Augmentations on 12th October in the 5th year of his reign(1552) did devise grant and to farm let the Manor and hundred to your subject from Michaelmas for 25 years, paying yearly £144-19-7.

By force of which lease your subject entered into the said Manor and was thereof possessed and on 9th of October last sent his steward Richard Dyer to conduct the Court Baron and Court Leet within the said Manor and hundred. At which several courts Robert Philipp, William Brightridge, Michael Light, Richard Hawkins, Robert Randall, Thomas Cole, John Tabbe, John Cole of Chylinton, Adam Locke and Martin Lyff, John Pope of Beiston and John Alyngton were sworn upon the holy evangelists to enquire of all such things as were enquirable for the purposes of the Court Baron and Court Leet of the Manor and thereof to make their presentment.

Said persons, being so sworn, came again into the Court after that they were agreed upon their verdict. And then and there before the steward keeping the court on the 9th of October they presented amongst other things that they had elected and chosen Thomas Cole, out of the same twelve men to be the reeve of the Manor for the next year.

But Dyer, your subject's steward, said that he had a commandment from your subject that Thomas Cole should not be sent to gather the rents of the Manor for the year following because the choice thereof did remain with your said subject, as appeareth by the customary book of the said Manor.

After which declaration by the steward, the said Thomas Cole, William Brightridge, Michael Knight, Robert Randall, John Tabbe, John Cole, Adam Locke and William Lyff made a great uproar and exclamation, the said Thomas Cole saying with a loud voice, 'I will be reeve here for this year coming, whosoever say may' and the other jurors, his fellows last named, saying expressly and swearing great oaths that Thomas Cole should be reeve, and they would know who durst say nay thereunto.

Thereupon Thomas Cole and his complices last before specially named, by all manner of semblings of countenances and fury of speech menaced Dyer, your servant's steward, to enter their presentment that they had chosen Thomas Cole as reeve of the Manor for this year. Which the steward refused to do, or make any entry of their presentment, upon which refusal Thomas Cole and his complices, after consultation between them, in that 9th day of October forcibly, riotously, and in riotous manner assembling themselves, having daggers and other weapons, some about them and some near to them, said to Dyer, your subject's steward, that he should not preside in the keeping of the Courts unless he would admit Thomas Cole to be reeve there. Thereat, the same Thomas Cole laid his hand upon the Court Book of the said steward, meaning to take it away from Dyer, who, understanding his lewd and ill mien, retained his book. But the said Thomas Cole tore away one piece of the book as Dyer was striving with Cole to have the book.

Whereupon, Thomas Cole and his complices, seeing that Thomas Cole had failed of their purpose in taking the Court Book from Dyer the steward, made a great uproar amongst all the tenants of the said Manor there present, being to the number of 100 persons and more, speaking aloud to them all and saying, 'Let us go find what we shall do. Let the steward keep the Court alone'.

And so, partly through menacing and threatening and partly through fear of Thomas Cole and his complices, they caused all the tenants of the Manor to depart. They themselves likewise departed, without any manner of presentment made by Thomas Cole and his fellows on such things as were enquirable within the said Courts according to the law. By means whereof, the assembly of Thomas Cole and his complices, by the lewd and dishonest behaviour, became balefull by your Grace's laws.

Besides the punishment due for the great offence by them committed by departing from the Leet Court after they were sworn, before that they had made their presentment and had licence to depart : further, most dread Sovereign Lord and Lady, upon the next Sunday following that 9th day of October, and at divers other Sundays and holydays after, this Thomas Cole and his complices, in the time of divine service within the parish church of Stokingham, when the people of the parish were there most fullest, said 'How say ye all? Shall not Thomas Cole be reeve? Will not ye hold with him? Will not you uphold the customs that our forefathers have used within this manor?'

According to the Customary Book which remained amongst them, and upon your subject's request, John Pridiam appointed a Court to be kept in Stokingham upon the 18th day of December. At that day, so appointed, John Pridiam, before the hour appointed for the keeping of the Court, sent for Thomas Cole and his complices to speak with him in the church of Stokingham.

They came to him, and John Pridiam asked of them for what cause of consideration they had stayed the payment of the rent due and payable to your subject for the customary tenancies in the Manor, and also wherefore they had so used themselves at the last law Court.

Whereunto Thomas Cole, for himself and for the rest, said these words as followeth, 'We have another Lord, and therefore we will pay Stourton no rent. And as for our doings at the last Court: because the steward will not swear me reeve as I was chosen, therefore we will make no presentment.'

Although John Pridiam then willed them to consider their own Customary Book, and to follow that which the Customary Book prescribed, and to come to the Court appointed to be kept by the said John Pridiam, and do as they ought and should of right do, yet Thomas Cole and his complices refused, saying that neither they themselves would come nor any other of the tenants of the Manor.

And yet, nevertheless, John Pridiam at the hour and place appointed for the keeping of a Court Baron in the Manor, came to have kept that Court. But neither Thomas Cole and his complices nor any of them in the rest of the tenancy of the Manor, other than 4 or 5 persons, came to the Court as appointed. By means whereof, John Pridiam was enforced to depart without any Court there kept.

Their evil and naughty example of wrongful behaviour and assembly in your Highness Courts in the Court of the Manor, and their lewd and quarrelling speech in the church at the time of the saying of divine service, and their stubborn froward and obstinate absence by not coming to the Court then appointed, notwithstanding that knowledge thereof was given to them, shall encourage and cause other such evil disposed persons to do, practice and attempt the like balefull acts and things, unless condign punishment be provided.

In consideration whereof, may it please your Highnesses to grant your most gracious writ of subpoena to be directed to Thomas Cole, William Brighttrigge, Michael Knight, Robert Randall, John Tabbe, John Cole, Adam Locke, and William Lyff, commanding and requiring them personally to appear before your Highness' most honourable Counsel in the Star Chamber at a Certain day under a certain penalty, there to answer.⁴

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Public Record Office STAC/4/4/4
2. As in the 1309 'inquisition post mortem' of Mathew fitz John, quoted fully as an Appendix in 'The Lords of Stokenham' : W. A. Roberts: 1979

3. Public Record Office E321/30/25 and E321/31/3, where Stourton disputes with John Cornish and others, over land rights.
4. The end of the story is not known; though it may yet come to light.